



Town of
Lexington
Massachusetts



Lexington Community Center Annual Forum 2021

A print compilation of the Community Center
Celebrating 5 Years



March 2021

This is the 2nd annual report to our Community Partners reflecting on the Community Center achievements, initiatives and plans for the coming year. In 2019, the Community Center Program Advisory Committee was dissolved and with that a commitment to provide an annual forum to our Community Partners. The first annual forum was held in February 2020 providing stakeholders an overview of the accomplishments, challenges and opportunities that the Community Center has had in the first four and half years since opening in July 2015.

The year of 2020 held such promise for the Community Center as the first forum provided many great ideas for celebrating our 5 year anniversary since opening to the Community in July 2015. A few short weeks after our first forum, held on February 26, 2020, the pandemic hit and soon thereafter the Community Center doors closed along with a year full of plans, programs, services, activities and events. Our theme for 2020 stood strong throughout – *Community, Culture, and Collaboration*.

Although our doors have remained closed, many direct services continued, serving hundreds of community members. The year of 2020 has certainly been challenging, however it allowed opportunities for creativity in our approach to delivering our services in a variety of untraditional ways.

We have chosen to provide the 2020 updates through a report rather than a virtual roundtable presentation and encourage stakeholders to continue to reach out with suggestions, feedback and support in the coming months.

This moment in time has allowed the Town, Recreation & Community Programs and Human Services Departments to respond to and define the essential services that our community has come to rely on. These essential services have continued to engage health and wellness, reduce isolation, encourage outreach and volunteerism, while adhering to the state guidelines provided throughout the pandemic.

The Community Center will soon open its doors again and we look forward to seeing you all in person.

Here is to a healthy 2021,

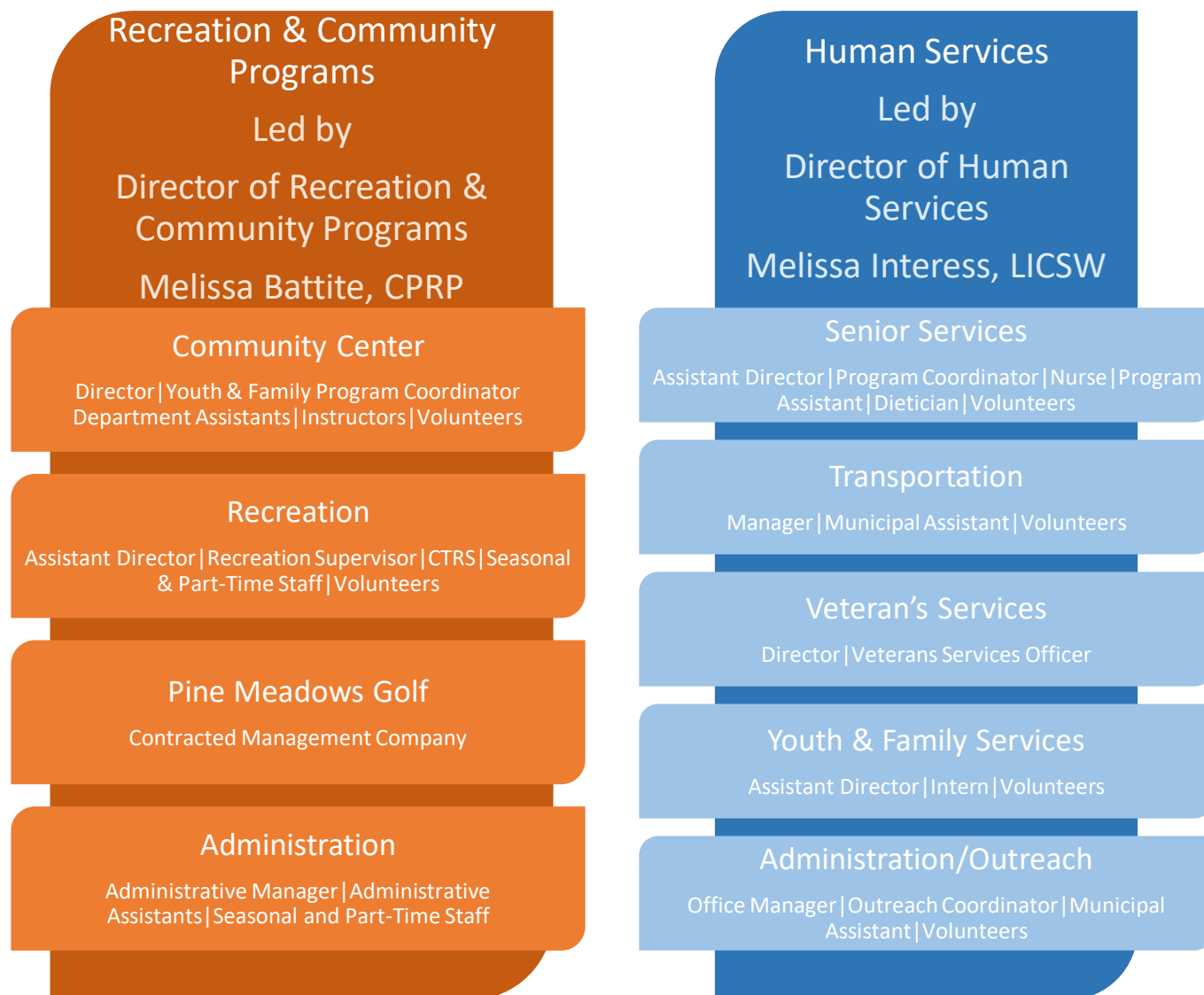
Melissa Termine Battite, CPRP
Director of Recreation & Community Programs

Melissa Interest, LICSW
Director of Human Services

Community Center Organizational Structure

CORE Values

Trustworthy – Teamwork – Accountability – Open-Minded – Respectful



The Community Center is a Town facility which is managed and operated by the Recreation & Community Programs Department. Coordination and collaboration, together with the Human Services Department, provides the most efficient operations and maximizes the use of space for community members of all ages and abilities.

Our Mission

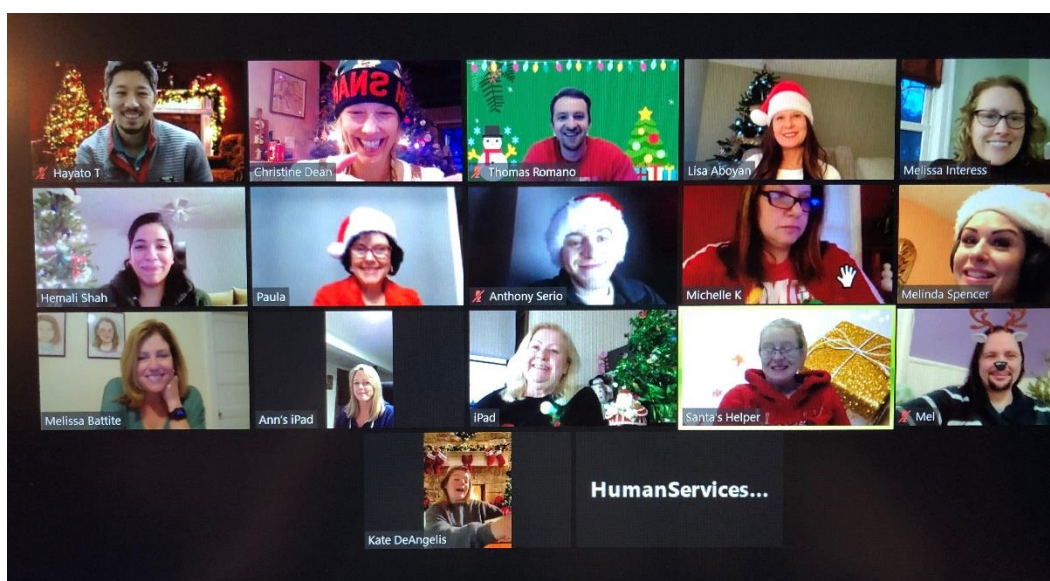
The mission of the Lexington Community Center is to enhance the quality of life for all Lexington residents by creating a warm, welcoming and inclusive environment.

The Community Center is a 32,600 square foot facility which opened in July 2015. There is 16,700 square feet of programmable space that includes 10 public meeting and activity rooms available to rent. In addition to providing space for Town programs, the Community Center is available for civic, cultural, charitable and educational groups and individual or organizations that serve the Lexington community and are engaged in activities consistent with the Community Center's mission.

Service Delivery Throughout 2020

Pivoting our focus on those essential services and the needs of community members guided us during this year of transition. Many struggled with insecurity as a result of access to adequate food, housing challenges, limited technology, financial concerns, health & wellness worries, increased isolation, and reduction or loss of work. These challenges in turn caused additional stress on the community and increased demand on resources, including staff and services that traditionally provide these supports.

As the year transitioned from in-person to almost fully remote, we quickly learned new ways to offer our services and continue to provide valuable experiences. Staff, volunteers and community members were up to the challenge and embarked on a new world through technology, getting up to speed on virtual meeting software and etiquette as a way to meet "in person." Services were reimaged in a virtual world. Fitness classes were modified so that participants could stay involved from home, utilizing household items as weights – sometimes a soup can is more than a soup can! The Community Center also offered participants to purchase hand weights and stress bands for at home work outs. In-person meetings were replaced with online meetings, emails, and phone calls. Distance and scheduling conflicts were no longer barriers, as we saw many new participants taking part in support groups, educational programs, fitness offerings, and trainings.



It's Essential

The Meals on Wheels program continued daily throughout the pandemic through our partnership with Minuteman Senior Services. Approximately 66 residents are served daily through the Meals on Wheels program.

“Curbside” or “Grab & Go” services were created providing access to traditional in person programs and services in addition to new events. These “Grab & Go” events allow residents to pull up to the Center, staff place their special event meals and activity supplies into their trunks or back seats. Many of these programs were made possible at minimal or not cost with financial and in kind support from the Friends of the Council on Aging, Lexington Public Schools Food Services, CHNA15, Dana Home Grant and the Lexington Police and Conservation departments. Over 450 seniors have been served through the Senior Services Grab & Go program, which first started in June 2020. Meals such as full Italian pasta meals with dessert, soup and sandwiches and full Chinese luncheon are examples of the few types of lunches that have been provided.

A partnership with the Lexington Public Schools Food Service has provided for free lunch and snacks to special events including the Home for the Holidays Grab and Go, the February Vacation week program and the Pop Up Park Monthly Events, Pumpkin Decorating Kit; Home and Transportation Giveaways.

The Center remained a site for local and national Election Days allowing residents a one way entry/exit to the Center, maintaining social distancing and adhering to guidelines, allowing residents to participate in these important elections.

Annual Flu Clinics continued, and much like the Elections, provided residents with a familiar, safe, and local place to receive their annual vaccination.

Although paused for a short time, the LexPress Transportation services resumed allowing residents to get around town, to and from appointments and/or employment. The LexConnect taxi program continued uninterrupted through the pandemic and provided many essential rides, including those traditionally offered by FISH (a volunteer service providing seniors with free rides to medical appointments) which ceased operations indefinitely due to the pandemic.

Home visits continued on a case by case basis to ensure that the needs of our clients were met in the best way possible. Our Sand for Seniors program continued during the winter despite the pandemic. Through our Sand for Seniors Program we served 63 individuals who required sand delivery due to either mobility issues or lack of informal support to acquire salt/sand for the winter months.

Most of the popular in person fitness classes such as Zumba, Strength Training, Yoga, Tai Chi and more, continued virtually through the pandemic, keeping seasonal instructors employed while community members were able to continue their fitness routines. Each week, over 400 seniors participate in a variety of more than 25 different Health & Wellness activities.

Exploring our Campus



The Community Center outdoor campus has become a true extension of our indoor space. Volunteers continue to come and maintain the beautiful raised garden beds. A bounty of flowers and small vegetables were enjoyed throughout the seasons. The Mansion patio and picnic tables became regular spaces to meet a friend for lunch in a safe, tree covered, outdoor place in all kinds of weather. The front lawn, open space and parking lots became home to a variety of youth programs such as archery, street hockey, and enrichment classes. An inspirational rock garden was created, allowing visitors to take or leave a painted message. Once the snow started to fall, familiar faces enjoying sledding our front lawn and hill along Marrett Road.



Staying Connected

Traditional in person Family events were made available in a virtual setting, such as, Family Feud events for both Lexington and Regional communities participating and competing in a fun, engaging way.

Birthday Greetings were shared beginning in April 2020 with over 3,000 birthday emails shared with members of the Community Center. This brought smiles to our residents unexpectedly.

Community Outreach was enhanced by sharing National awareness campaigns including Blood Donor Month, Heart Health, Development Disabilities and many more scheduled for 2021. This provided community members a way to learn more about positive initiatives continuing in our region in nation despite the pandemic.

Traditional in person programs that are led by community members, volunteers or local civic groups continue to thrive. The OWLL classes offered sessions focusing on The Magnificent National Parks and The Artful Brain with 175 participants. Wellness/Discussion Groups continued as well including Caregiver support groups, Current Event and Word Affairs. A new Coffee Break support group for seniors who are struggling with the pandemic was created with funding support from the Dana Home Grant.



Initiatives Continue

Initiatives continue towards achieving community-wide goals in addition to those of the Community Center, Recreation & Community Programs, and Human Services.

The Mental Health Task Force took a pause on direct work during the pandemic but still offered targeted outreach and virtual programs related to residents' essential needs. The Task Force has started to ramp back up, planning a Community Mental Health Assessment for the Spring of 2021. While we have a lot of information about the needs of our school-age population, we do not have enough information about the mental health of the adult residents in Lexington. The intent of the assessment is to better understand the mental health status and needs of Lexington community members aged 18 and over, as well as any potential barriers to accessing needed services. The Mental Health Task Force, with leadership from Municipal and School staff, will use this information to identify programs and services to address those needs and barriers in order to better serve all of our residents.

Toward an Equitable and Just Community, Lexington's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative kicked off in 2020. Visit our website [here](#) for the latest on what we've been doing and where we are going.

An Age Friendly Community, The Council on Aging Board successfully completed two of the many actions steps needed to make Lexington Age Friendly. The first successful program was the creation of a neighborhood post card. September 28th is National Good Neighbor Day and to celebrate that the Council on Aging Board created a postcard that allowed neighbors to introduce themselves and share a fun fact. The goal was to help reduce isolation and allow a method for communication among neighbors who may not know each other. The other program was a commerce program where the Council on Aging worked with local retailers to create an extensive list of businesses that offered accommodations for older adults to shop safely. The goal was twofold, one to help older adults know where they can shop safely and what stores were offering special initiatives to seniors. The second goal was to help local retailers earn some more business while educating them with the needs of Lexington seniors. The Council on Aging Board and Human Services staff will continue to work on further expanding Age Friendly initiatives in the coming years.

The Community Needs Assessment was approved at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. It was a direct outcome of the 2018 Annual Town Meeting failed request for Community Center expansion funding. The project was launched in March 2020. We discovered through public engagement, focus groups and public meetings the following findings:

- It is critical to identify and distinguish needs from wants.
- Indoor space is lacking.
- There is a desire to have community coordination; identify the "face" for different entities.
- There is a strong importance placed on funding parks and recreation.
- An integral part of programming should include cultural diversity, inclusion and accessibility.
- Alternate funding sources may be required.
- Sport field maintenance can be improved.

Through the public process and presentations, the final report was accepted in October 2020. The final outcomes and recommendations will help guide the Town in future decision making when considering business planning, park classifications, system funding, community marketing, maintenance, facilities and programming.

Since the fall of 2020, the Recreation Committee and staff have created Working Groups to address outcomes and recommend short term and long term steps for implementing the recommendations. In 2021, the Facilities/Infrastructure Group has plans to collaborate with the Conservation Commission, gather local and regional information to better understand land acquisition practices/criteria, and identify ways to maximize outdoor recreation facilities permitting. The Programming/Level of Service Group will focus on enhancing relationships with community stakeholders, identify and pursue grant opportunities for programming, and explore outdoor nature programs in addition to continued growth with cultural and therapeutic opportunities. The Financial Group will focus on exploring next step towards what is needed to support a local foundation and alternate funding sources, in particular with the open space, trail maintenance and park system. They will also work towards identifying the lead/support agency for operational and capital planning for each asset.



Supporting the Select Board Pillars of a Livable & Sustainable Community - 2020

Livability for All Ages & Stages

Providing safe spaces, places and opportunities for the community throughout the lifespan remains a priority. The Community Center is a natural hub in creating healthy living for the Lexington community through drop in activities, socializing, sharing meals, stories and participating in organized wellness groups and classes with a focus on mind, body and soul.

- ☐ Onboard a full time Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist to facilitate recreation and leisure programming as a means to enhance and/or maintain physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual domains. The Therapeutic Recreation Program provides specialized and inclusive programs and services for individuals of all ages and abilities.
- ☐ The Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) is involved in a number of collaborations to provide volunteer opportunities, intergenerational programs and social groups. Our CTRS is a member of the Core Team of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts.
- ☐ Continued focus on transportation, providing residents with access to needed services in and around Lexington, by increasing the Transportation Manager to full time hours, adding oversight of the Safe Routes to School program in the Transportation division, and acquiring funding to look at more ways to educate the public about transit and consider regionalized services.

Thriving Local Economy

- ☐ Safe public spaces were a premium as community members explored the outdoors
- ☐ Work with businesses and property owners to develop creative and integrated solutions
 - Partner with businesses for fitness classes outside
- ☐ Partner with Economic Development in application for Shared Streets Winter Grant
- ☐ Promote Visitor's Center operations and services through Community Center resources such as e-news and program guides.

Engage in a community conversation to define what attractive and vibrant would look like for Lexington

- ☐ Updated Trends Report as part of the Comprehensive Plan
- ☐ Conversations during and continue as outcome of the Community Needs Assessment
- ☐ Continued to engage the community in Therapeutic Recreation programmatic decisions through Inclusion Forums and surveys

Town-Wide Fiscal Stewardship

- ☐ Managing the Takeda donation to provide financial assistance to residents in need
- ☐ Scholarship money
- ☐ Grants to continue and expand classes
 - Dana Home
 - Community Health Network Area (CHNA-15 DoN-Determination of Need)
 - Shared Winter Streets Grant (applying 2/2021)
 - Leadership Pathways Grant (applying 2/2021)

Quality Infrastructure, Amenities & Municipal Services

- ☐ Preparation for the expansion of the Recreation Committee membership from 5 to 7 members
- ☐ Align the common goals of shared Committees to strengthen projects and community impact
- ☐ Opening of the Center Recreation Complex Track & Field
- ☐ New Point of Sale system to streamline customer experience and business operations
- ☐ New Lexington Community Center sign installed at the Marrett Road entrance
- ☐ Request (FY22/23) funding to replace Community Center sidewalk at the Mansion

Community Character

- ☐ Community Surveys to gauge interest and temperature for returning to in person services
- ☐ Online trainings to learn “how to” use zoom, login to classes, etc.

Recreation & Community Programs | Human Services Department



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March/April edition of The SAGE

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The Future is Bright

The coming year is filled with hope, inspiration and excitement. The Community Center doors will again open and welcome all back. The timing and exact plan for reopening has not yet been determined but rest assured, the upcoming seasons will be filled with opportunities. The longer days and warmer temperatures allow us to return to in person programs, outdoor activities and embrace all the wonder of the New England seasons.

Into the future, we take with us an abundance of new ideas for how to offer programs, including virtual options, more use of outdoor spaces, and hybrid versions of traditionally in-person opportunities while continuing to provide the highest quality programming to a diverse community based on their wants and needs.

As we evaluate what a safe re-opening of the Community Center will look like for the community, we invite you to share your input by participating in our short survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LCCReopen>



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